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ABSTRACT

Presenting a framework for brain-compatible learning and literacy education implemented in grades K-5 in Carroll County (Georgia) schools, this group presentation describes brain-based education as being aware and familiar with the most recent research that is out there about how brains learn best and what facilitates brains' learning and incorporating that research into educational procedures. Four initiatives are outlined: (1) using brain-based education; (2) putting language arts far ahead of everything else; (3) focusing on procedures; and (4) focusing on personal and leadership development. The presentation engaged participants in learning stations that modeled this approach, addressing the learning environment, successful teaching practices based on a language arts framework, and classroom management techniques that are beginning to reflect "phenomenal gains" in student performance. (Author/SC)

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A Framework for Literacy in a Brain-Compatible Environment

ABSTRACT

This workshop presented a framework for brain-compatible learning and literacy education being implemented in grades K-5 in Carroll County Schools. The presentation engaged participants in learning stations that modeled this approach, addressing the learning environment, successful teaching practices based on a language arts framework, and classroom management techniques that are beginning to reflect phenomenal gains in student performance.

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A Framework for Literacy in a Brain-Compatible Environment

NOTE: This presentation was given by a team of 12 Carroll County School System employees, including administrators, teachers and a board member at ASCD in San Francisco, Ca. 3 6 99.

Gary Boehmer, Superintendent: Thank you for your interest in learning our framework for implementing a successful elementary classroom experience for every child. We are glad you have joined us today to hear about our methods and to participate in a simulation of some of these practices. In our system, we have a four-prong integrated approach to instruction. You think about putting a jigsaw puzzle together. You have all the little pieces spread out on the table when you dump it out. You set the picture up on the side of the table, and you are constantly looking back and forth between the big picture, the completed picture there in front of you, and the little pieces that have to be put together to recreate that picture; that is what we are all about in our district. We have a very clear picture on a table as to what the final product will look like when we get through, but we are then constantly having to look back at the picture to see which one goes into place next and where its place is within that picture. So we are engaged in systemic change in increments.

What are the components that make up our program? The first one is brain-based education. By brain-based education, we do not mean a checklist of things that you can take around a classroom and say, "Yes, this teacher is doing this," or "No, they are not." Brain-based education is being aware and making yourself familiar with the most recent research that is out there about how brains learn best and what facilitates brains' learning, and incorporating that in what we do. Those in the medical profession must keep up with the most recent research, with the newest drugs and procedures in order to properly serve their patients. If we are truly a profession as we claim to be, then we have an obligation to do the exactly same thing.

We must know the newest research that is out there that tells us what works for our children. You must know if you are going to be an effective classroom teacher and a building level leader so that, for example, when a boy works hard you realize the testosterone in his brain breaks down into adrenalin. Most of us know that adrenalin is a chemical in your brain that causes you to speed up, so that the more a boy works the more adrenalin is in his brain and more he can't sit still. Those of you who are elementary teachers know that by one, two or three o'clock those guys are bouncing all around the place. Likewise, you know that the girls have a lot of estrogen in their brain that breaks down chemically to produce epinephrine. Epinephrine is a sedative of sorts, so the harder your kids work in your room, the boys get more and more hyper from the adrenalin that is built up in their brains the girls get more and more sedated by the epinephrine in their brains, and there are things you can do to combat those situations. But if you don't know that is what's happening to your children, you are going to sit there and bang those boys over the head with a ruler because they won't sit still and you are going to fuss about the girls going to sleep and not paying attention, and that may not be deliberate for either of them. So So number one, brain-based education involves understanding the research, understanding the physiology of the brain and knowing how it works.

Our second area of focus involves putting language arts fifty thousand miles ahead of everything else. Language is the key for these kids to learn anything that they will learn other than through emotional experiences. Anything academic that goes into their brains will enter through language, whether it is math, science, social studies or whatever. If it goes into their brains so that they can access it and pull it back out for some purpose, it went in there with language. Therefore, language plays a preeminent part in all that takes place, and we have worked and worked in this area, and you will hear a lot today about language arts.

The third part of our four initiatives is procedures, using Dr. Harry Wong as the basis for much of it. Dr. Wong is from right here in California, and no doubt most of you are familiar with him through your work in education. Maintaining classroom order through routines and procedures, and trying to get away from punitive discipline in classrooms is the key to on-task behavior. Routines, procedures and setting expectations for quality learning is preferable to some management plan or discipline plan that does not directly impact those children's education and their knowledge base.

The fourth area would be personal and leadership development as advocated by Stephen Covey. The others things are children-oriented and teacher-oriented toward children, but in order to make all these changes, in order to get people to get along and to engage in teamwork that is essential for success, Steven Covey's seven habits and all they imply about personal development and leadership plays a part in our plan. So four keys make up our journey toward systemic change: brain-based education, a tremendous emphasis on language arts, procedures and classroom management, personal and leadership development. These four building blocks comprise the foundation or the framework we are putting together to bring about systemic change in Carroll County. I believe that you cannot latch onto an individual thing out there and bring about systemic change in your district. It must be a collection, it must be components that touch all aspects of the educational process within your school system or within your school, or it will never succeed. Again, we appreciate having you here; now I will turn it over to Dr. Baker.

Dr. Claire Baker, Director of Staff Development: You may have noticed when you came in here that we had a few procedures in place, and of course those are based on Dr. Wong and his book, *The First Days of School*. Probably most of you have heard of that book and some of you may be using it in your system. We are trying to institutionalize some of its procedures because unless the whole school is involved in it, frequently students don't get continuity and it really does not do that much good. One of our procedures today is a little label we gave you when you came in, telling you where to sit. So one detail that a child should know when he walks into the classroom is where he is going to sit. Another procedure that is in place is a bell work assignment that was on the overhead projector today, giving you something to do that is connected to the lesson. This procedure gets students involved immediately when they walk into the classroom.

The next procedure that we will follow concerns telling you the objectives of this lesson, because everyone should know exactly what to expect and what you are going to learn. The objectives today for you are that you will be able to explain some aspects of brain-based learning

in the classroom environment, that you will be able to explain some components of the reading framework that we use, and you will gain some understanding in these centers when we get to that in a minute. A third objective is for you to engage in some activities that are brain-based. Another procedure is a homework assignment which I am going to give you now because I'm not sure we will get back to it. Your homework for today or for a future date is to go back to your school or your school system and begin to attempt to implement in any way you can some of the elements that you can see would make sense for your system or your classroom; so we hope that you will do that.

Now let's take just a few minutes to go over the brain quiz that you were doing for bell work. I was walking around just trying to notice whether the people were getting answers to this quiz pretty much on target, and I noticed that some of you were and some weren't, so just quickly let's go over just the myths. Number two reads, "A child's genetic makeup is the most important determinant of how intelligent s/he will be," and that statement is a myth. The genetic makeup is a very important part of what a person will be; however, if you will, picture in your mind a Venn Diagram and imagine heredity and environment as the two overlapping circles. The environment part involves a child building dendrites and making those patterns and connections that is the part that is going to make that child's brain uniquely organized and make that person what he turns out to be. The overlap of the Venn Diagram is the unique way a person interprets his experience, based on his genetic makeup and his prior experience. When you leave this room today your brain will be organized differently than when you came in here. You will have some dendrites that you did not have when you came in here today. And no two of your brains will take away exactly the same information. It is interesting to think that what we do in the classroom creates a physical phenomenon in students' brains, and that is an important part of the knowledge that brain research brings to education. Much of what you are going to hear and see today, you are going to say, "We do that," or "A good teacher always does that," but in fact we know now why teachers do that. We have a scientific basis for it.

Item number five is a myth, which states, "The larger the brain, the smarter the student." In fact, most adult brains weigh around three pounds unless they are diseased or damaged. There may be a few ounces of difference, but it is the dendrites and the connections and the growth inside the brain that makes the difference in intelligence. Item number six states, "The brain acts more like a sponge than a sieve when processing new information, which is a myth. The brain acts more like a sieve because we must always first sort information, and while we retain some of it, much of it is dropping out. We retain it on the basis of meaning and on the basis of what we already know; therefore, it is critical to build experiences for children so they will have those experiences to draw on and add to.

Item number ten says, "Memory for facts is the most powerful of all types of memory." Instead, however, emotions charge our memories . We know that we learn emotionally and that is how information comes into the brain. Powerful memories are those that come into the brain through powerful emotions. You can test yourself, and you will probably remember right away that you strongly remember the things that are big in your life emotionally. Item number twelve

states, "The brain stores innumerable pictures." The brain stores patterns of pictures rather than pictures themselves, constantly constructing and reconstructing what it knows. Number sixteen says "Brains are made up of one kind of cell." Two kinds of cells are in the brain. The neuron is the one we talk about the most, and glial cells are support cells. They are protein cells, and it is thought that Alzheimers' Disease could be cause by an over-active glial cell syndrome. Number twenty is not a myth, but it is interesting. As far as the brain is concerned, you must use it or lose it; however, the good news is you have so many neurons and connections in your brain that you don't really have worry about it. Nevertheless, if you want to keep your intelligence at it peak you have to continually challenge yourself.

At this time we are going to move to a center. You will actually move one more time from this center and that will happen in about 15 minutes. At that time we will tell you that it is time to stop and Joyce Lambert is going to lead you in some motor skills activities, and she will explain the importance of motor development and motor activity for children. After that activity you will swap centers. If you are in a blue center you will go to the other blue center which is right beside you, just swap, and same for the red centers. Finally, Dorothy Callaway, one of our board members, is going to tell you from a board of education perspective what is happening in our school system.

Louanne Hutcheson, Director of Early Childhood Education, speaking in a Language Arts Framework Center: We know a lot about how the brain works we incorporate that in each part of our framework. You will notice that there are four parts of the framework it looks almost as though those parts of the framework are separate but actually these parts bleed together. When we have guided reading we will have writing going on, you will have independent reading going on, you will find word study going on so it is not as separate as it may seem on this model. Basically, there are four parts to the framework. We do believe that word study is an important part of the framework, phonics, yes, you must have phonics to read and in order to spell, but we do know some things about the way the brain takes in phonics. We do nothing in isolation. We have no basal texts, as all of our reading and writing experience are authentic in nature. We us 100% authentic literature and we have meaningful and purposeful writing activities.

We have guided reading, a teacher-led activity, and small group-oriented writing. We have three types of writing. If we were in the South, I would ask if any of you make biscuits, and I don't mean the Pillsbury kind, I mean the kind your granny made, and I would ask how you learned that. And you would tell me she showed you how and she stood there and watched you put your hands in the bread tray and then eventually you did it by yourself. And so it is in reading and writing; we have writing and reading *for* children we have writing and reading *with* children and eventually we have writing and reading *by* children. And now Anita Dillard, an elementary teacher who practices this model, will explain how she works with it.

Anita Dillard, Teacher, Mt. Zion Elementary School, speaking in a Language Arts Framework Center: Several years ago at Mount Zion we realized that what we were doing was not working. Our children were about two points above the national at-risk average in the

percentile with ITBS testing, so with the help of our county office we hired a consultant to teach us how to implement the reading framework by station-centered activities. So this is what we have been doing for the past few years, and I must say it is working. We were at 27 percentile and a group I just finished having with the two year loop went from 27 percentile to 57.

I'm looping in a fourth-fifth grade progression. I start out with fourth graders and carry them to the fifth. I must tell you some of the things we do. We take our writing, as you may see on some of the examples I have for you. We go through poetry with poetry books. My students love poetry, so we turn around and go back and do rewriting in our groups. We have four guide books, I say stations, we call them centered stations, and we have guided reading and that's when I have small group instruction. I hear every child every day read to me while the rest of the children are moving from station to station.

I implemented a social studies station, as I wanted my social studies and science to be included. We also have a listening station. For the children who are struggling, we give a little book pack, we have five of those and they take them home each night and listen to recorded books. We also have a listening station in our classroom, so I actually have six stations. As you can tell, social studies, our writing, and making word stations are all accomplished through using authentic literature. I have a handout for you that will show you some of the stations. It will give you some idea of how we plan stations and how we implement them. Also in that list I have a list of authentic literature, which is by no means all that I use, but it is some that will give you an idea. We try to have reading every morning whole group, and that leads into our writing basically, and then when we go into stations I have different leveled books. My are children basically all heterogeneously grouped except in my guided reading group and so I can meet the child on their level, which I know through small easy testing we do at the beginning of the year; I see where each child is and we start from there. It is an individual learning process and it really works. When we go to stations other than guided reading it is heterogeneously grouped, which encourages peer tutoring and cooperative learning, and it works really well. In the making word station we use Patricia Cunningham's model. The children will do that whole group and as they get familiar with it then they learn to do it independently in the stations.

In the beginning of the year, the main thing we do with Harry Wong's procedures is to set the procedures and practice them as least two weeks. At this time, we are doing whole group while we are setting the stations up and letting the children know and understand what is expected of them in stations. The next two weeks are spent with me actually physically in one station. In this way, we learn how to take out our folders and handle materials and supplies that we will be using in stations, as well as understand other procedures that are expected in stations. When it is finally time for the children to start implementing the stations, they know exactly what to do and know what is expected of them. All children want to please; all they want to know is what you want them to do, and it works so well.

Concerning assessment, we are assessing every day. We do running records. As the child progresses, then that child moves on to the next higher level reading group. Not everything in my

class is thematic, but I do try to implement history and science in a thematic unit. Many people have asked me how I can implement history with different levels. I have copies of books here from any thing from the second grade reading level to the seventh. The children loved to progress into the next level. You can teach any type of history with a certain level type of book. We can do it with picture books we can do it with something just as simple as the book *Just a few words, Mr. Lincoln* or we can go up to *Charley Skadattle*, so it depends on the level and how the child progresses.

We have the Accelerated Reader Program in our school, and it is very encouraging for the students, as they feel success. For those of you who are not familiar with it, students read a library book and then take a test on the computer. It has just basic little questions that shows comprehension.

Louanne Hutcheson, responding to questions: We also buy multiple copy texts for all of our teachers. Our teachers do not ever have enough--how many books does a teacher need? Always just one more, right? But we have invested in a lot of multiple copy sets that Anita and teacher like her use in guided reading. We have a state curriculum, and if you will notice on the house itself the CRCT side the assessment side is a state assessment test on the state curriculum that we have a set of objectives so we have to remember those objectives, but the needs of the child must come first.

One other thing you might find interesting. Mr. Boehmer mentioned about our change being systemic. One of the ways we have done that has been very successful in our system is to establish model classrooms, and Anita was one of the first model classrooms that we had. You know, a peer can teach a peer much better that a supervisor can teach a peer, and we have found that teachers like Anita can be very helpful to us because they live the philosophy every day. We have had a lot of success with model classrooms and using them as a training ground for our other teachers. We provide these teachers release time for training and provide other teachers release time to visit their classrooms. Another thing we do is to go into these model classrooms and we critique their lessons in a low-level anxiety type situation that is not connected to their formal evaluation at all. We do believe in a brain-based model, and teachers volunteer for these model classrooms; it is something they desire to do, so that makes the power.

Joyce Lambert, physical education teacher, speaking to the entire group: I am a movement education facilitator at Whitesburg Elementary School. By a show of hands, how many of you know about the dominance profile or brain gym? It is my belief that putting a child through many movements is like immersing them in language; we immerse them with movement and we know through research that the brain and body are connected. They are not two separate entities, but they both have to work together. If we can get them to work together then there is enhanced learning. So what I do is not only bring this into my classroom, but also I help teachers bring cognitive motor skills into their classrooms. So I am going to show you a little bit of what we do. The dominance profile is what we start with and if you want to sketch a little domino man on a sheet of paper. We are going to try to do a couple of things now. We know that when we

take information in we do it through the eyes, the ears and tactile movement and then, of course, in my occupation I want to know about the whole body, but in the classroom the teachers are mainly concerned with the three areas of preprioception. One thing we do, notice that there is a bulls eye on the wall and another one taped up. We are going to do your dominance profile, so let's start with the eye. I would like for you to clasp your hands together, stick out your index fingers and point them at the bulls eye with both eyes open. Now with both eyes open and your fingers pointing in the middle of that bulls eye, close first your left eye and look where your fingers are in relation to the bulls eye. Then do the same with your right eye and observe. Did one of them jump off? The one that stayed on the center is your dominant eye.

Another way to check that is to make a small triangle with your hand right out in front of you like this. You can use a partner with this or you can use me or you can use those bulls eyes again, but I tell my students that they must look at me and put their triangle on my nose, and with both eyes open extend their arms out. Now you can get a partner real quickly and try that, but that reenforces what you see with that bulls eye.

What does this tell us about a child concerning their vision? We know that the right eye tracks from left to right as printed words like we read. The left eye tracks from right to left which is opposite to the way we read. As far as hand dominance goes, you know which hand you write with, which hand you eat with, so that is pretty easy. With a child, we would use throwing bean bags and throwing objects to determine dominance. I call it creative trickery to get my students to do things so I can observe movement their movement.

Now choose a partner quickly and I am going to tell you what to do. Assign one person A and one per B. A will do the talking, and B will do the listening. B close your eyes and A is going is going to whisper, we are not going to talk out loud, we are going to whisper.
I want B to lean your ear so that you can only hear the person who is talking to you, so you must shut out this other activity that is going on around you. You have got to focus as we say, so focus on what your person is saying. Ready, A's go. Notice what happens now. B you are the talker and, A, you close your eyes now and whisper and notice.

Now let's analyze what we learned from that experience. In my partner's case, when I tried to whisper, he was really trying to focus on what I was saying and leaned toward me with his dominant ear. To me, knowing the dominant ear is the most difficult of the dominance areas to determine, but again, you have to use creative trickery. I have also taken music, words to a familiar song, turned it down very low and had the child tell me at what point they were in that song, which forced the child to go listen and in order to repeat the words.

David Butler, Principal, Mt. Zion Elementary, speaking in a Brain-based Center: At my school we began working on brain based instruction five years ago. We have been working with a brain-based consultant, Dr. Frizt Mengert from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, for the past four years. We have also worked with Marie Carbo of National Reading Styles. We have also studied intensively, In-services have been provided for us through the county office on

the reading framework of Patricia Cunningham, and we implemented that framework year before last. Our staff did such an outstanding job with it that that spring we made application to the IRA for the exemplary reading program award we were fortunate enough to be the recipient of that exemplary reading program award for the entire State of Georgia. I believe that the reading framework was critical to what we accomplished, but also critical was the brain compatible environments and the brain-based instruction which we implement. All of the elementary schools in our system are moving in that direction and our children are benefitting so much. Our superintendent and board of education have a focus on doing what is right for children in instruction and curriculum, and it is a pleasure to work in a system where children are the focus.

I am going to talk with you very briefly about the classroom environment and some of the expectation and attitudes that we worked on at Mount Zion Elementary. If you will flip to about page two in there it talks to you about lighting, the importance of using alternative lighting as opposed to the four-foot flourescent bulbs which are very agitating to hyperactive children. The furniture in our classrooms are not desks, but we have tables and chairs, small sofas, bean bags, rocking chairs, reading lofts, and large pillows that the students lie on to read to get comfortable. We also know the importance of music that we use that not only in the instructional day but as background, as we have here today. This classical or baroque music, which is 60 beats per minute, the same as your heart at rest, has a very calming effect and it makes the brain more receptive to processing, storing and being able to retrieve information.

Temperature is also another critical component in classroom environment. If it fluctuates three degrees higher than is comfortable for a person, it interferes with the brain's being able to function optimally. Another area is the aroma and the effect or impact it has on the brain, and Dr. Mengert says this is the going to be the next big area in brain research. On the next page you will see that hydration is very important to the optimal function of the brain. We allow our students to have water bottles at all times during the day. During intense focus and concentration there are chemical reactions in the brain and this causes heat and that dehydrates the brain so it is essential that if you don't allow students water bottles you at least give them to take breaks very frequently to go and replenish that. Also the movement and mobility the motion replenishes the glucose and serotonin of the brain and optimal efficiency also. If you are familiar with Marie Carbo she also indicates that some student learn better with intake, we provide nutritious snacks and that would be fruit, popcorn, pretzels, crackers, fruit juices and things of that nature which also replenishes glucose so that the brain can function properly.

Frequent breaks from intense concentration is also necessary. Do not confuse down time with free time. I had a few teachers that confused about that, and we had make is clear that you want a station or activity that is still instructional in nature but does not require intense focus and concentration . The brain needs this down time to compose and pull itself back together. We have this year made it part of our instructional day to include motion and movement, ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes after lunch, at which time the students do some of the activity that you were just involved in. They do that in the classroom; some use movement, some use dance, and some use the brain gym activities, but is so important for the brain to become refocused as far

as having some exercise and some movement. Mr. Boehmer was talking earlier about the effect of testosterone and estrogen produced in children's brains. If you have ever been a first, second or third grade teacher you know how anxious children can become when they are asked to sit for long periods of time. So what we have attempted to do is to accommodate the needs of the children through the structure of our classrooms, as opposed to accommodating the needs of the adults in the room, which in the traditional classroom seems to be the case more often than not. We also make every attempt to give every child an opportunity to be successful during instruction. Every day we hit every major learning style, and we are also making our teachers familiar with the multiple intelligences that go over and beyond the four major learning styles. This summer our system will have David Lazear, who studied under Howard Gardner, do a three-day presentation on multiple intelligences and how that should impact instruction in the classroom.

I was going to talk to you about how we have arrived at where we are, but time is so short that I am going right to results. If you will go to a chart that looks something like this it is about five pages from the end of this handout, I will share with you some hard data. A lot of people say that this is all fine and good and it sounds lovely, and it sounds that the children are real comfortable in your school, but how is that impacting student achievement? In our case it has impacted student achievement quite significantly. Three years ago these students were tested as third graders they were in the 27th percentile in reading comprehension, two percentile points above that entire grade level being at-risk. Two years later, after being in a brain compatible learning environment with brain-based instruction and a reading framework focus with emphasis on authentic literature and integration across the curriculum, those scores increased to the 51st percentile.

Math scores did not increase as much as we would like, but I will be perfectly honest with you--it was our priority to teach those children to read, because in primary grades and even through elementary, literacy should be our top priority. What is most significant to me is the science and social studies scores. Nowhere in our instructional day is there time allotted for the teaching of science and social studies, as we teach language arts three hours a day, math one hour a day, exploratory one hour a day and by the time you throw in recess and lunch that pretty much fills your day up. We do consider recess and physical education as integral parts of our instructional day, because the motion and movement are so vital for children's development and especially for coordination skills. But as I was saying, through the use of authentic literature integrating the curriculum, science scores increased from the 29th percentile to the 58th percentile and social studies increased from 41st to the 65th percentile, proving that if you will teach children to read and if you will teach them to think and solve problems, they can do well even on something not so brain compatible as standardized tests.

Dorothy Callaway, Board Member: Please feel with me the humbleness I feel as I stand here in the mist of such great educators who have preceded me today. These persons, along with our other personnel and our school board and community at large, pool our talents as we strive to make our school system second to none. Our school system is comprised of six districts and each

district has a representative who is elected and we have an appointed superintendent. We have three educational levels and those school configurations are pre-k through grade 5, grades 6 through 8, and grades 9 through 12.

And where do we as the board of education fit in the scheme of things? As a board we see ourselves as a support team. We support what these experts tell us is best for the children and that is what we are there for. Georgia is one of the fastest growing states in the nation. Atlanta is a metropolitan magnet that attracts people from all over the United States. Carroll County is 30 miles west of Atlanta and is one of the fastest growing of the eight metropolitan counties in the Atlanta area. Right now 20% of our population are between the ages of 4 to 19. Recent statistics tells us that of the people moving into our fast-growing area by the time of 2005, 34% of the people moving in will be between the ages of 5 and 19. So you can see just how fast we are growing. Considering this rapid growth, we are focusing on four main priorities as a board: we have to make sure there is enough space for our students, we must have well-trained teachers and personnel, we must focus on school safety and we must have community involvement. To deal with adequate space, we are in the process of purchasing land for schools to meet demand of this rapid growth. This fall we will open a new school. Next fall we will open another new school and 2001 will still open a another school. To ensure that we maintain and get quality teachers we are making sure that we try to pay our personnel adequate salaries so that we can keep these wonderful people that we have and we are recruiting all over the U.S. for quality personnel. In dealing with school safety, we are following the guidelines that were passed in the Georgia Senate this year which required schools to have safety plans for violence, natural disasters, terrorist acts, and accident involved in hazardous materials. With such a small system we are making sure that we have an ounce of prevention rather than a pound of cure.

One of the best ways to get our communities involved is to make sure that they are informed. Therefore, some of our districts are organizing community meetings and in this method we will provide opportunities for parents, students, teachers and other community members to become educated in all aspects of our schools. When people look at our board we want them to see us as a gift to the spirit and a gift to the lives of the children in our community, because we know that a rising tide lifts all floats. With us the thing that matters is the education of our children. We want our personnel to decide what needs to be done, act upon those decisions, notice what is working and change what is not working and expand the good things. Together these wonderful educators and our school board and our community will and can make a difference because we are putting our students first.

Gary Boehmer, Superintendent: Folks, we all know that the world is changing. Mechanics do not work on cars today as they did thirty years ago, doctors do not work on people today as they did thirty years ago. Things are not the way they used to be and they are changing faster and faster. It is important, it is essential, that we stop worrying about doing things the right way, but instead start doing things that are right. You can do something the right way and harm your students by giving them information rather than leading them to realize the significance of what is being taught. It is essential that we began to think about what is right for our children and

stop worrying about doing what someone else said is the right way. That does not mean you stop listening to folks, but you have got to start thinking and reflecting upon what you are doing. On the front of your folders it says "Putting students first through quality and excellence." That is an important activity that we have engaged in our district; all the leadership of our school system was involved in that. We hashed over one word in that for several hours one day. But that statement gets to the heart and essence of what we are supposed to be all about. Putting students first--if we will do that it will be easier for us to do the right thing.

Let me retell a story that probably everyone in the room has heard. A man standing on the back deck of a beach house was looking down over the beach and ocean that was moving toward dead low tide, which means there was a lot of wet sand exposed. The man noticed that there was a young boy scurrying from one place to another and so that the man came off the deck and walked onto the beach into the wet sand to see what the young boy was doing. As he came closer to the young boy, he saw that the boy was picking up a stranded starfish. He ran over to the nearest wave and threw the starfish out in the water as far as he could, and he ran down the beach. Then he picked up another stranded starfish and ran over to the nearest wave and threw it out into the water as far as he could. Then the man began to look up and down the beach and realized that not only were there ten and hundreds but there were thousands of stranded starfish on that beach, so he went up to the young boy and said, "Son, there is no need to worry about wasting all this energy. Starfish have been here for thousands of years and no matter how many of them die on this beach this afternoon they will be here for thousands of more years."

The young boy looked at the starfish in his hands and he looked at the man and he said, "It will make a difference to this one." And he ran over to the nearest wave and threw the starfish as far out into the water as he could. If you remember nothing else from this session today, if you are going to serve those children that come to you on a daily basis in the way they must be served in order to secure their future and the future of our communities, our state and our country, you must love each child that walks into your room with all the energy that is within your heart. You must be on a mission minute by minute, day by day, month by month to save every child that you possibly can in the few moments that you have to save them from the lowering tide and that blazing sun that is out there trying to trap them. If you don't have that love in your heart, if it has eased off some, if you are no longer passionate about your profession, if you never had that passion about your profession, then I encourage you to go home and take and long hard look in the mirror because those starfish in your class need someone to pick them up and take care of them, and if you are not going to do it then you need to get out of the way and let somebody serve in your place. Again, we appreciate your coming.